SAFETY ALERT

A soldier recently died after falling while attempting to negotiate the "Inverted Rope Descent" event of a confidence obstacle course. The investigation into this accident revealed a discrepancy between the two standards describing the construction and use of this obstacle.

FM 21-20 requires a platform for the instructor and student at the top of the tower, and a safety net. It also requires the apparatus to be built in accordance with Corps of Engineers drawing 28-13-95. This drawing, however, does not show a safety net or a platform on the tower. As a result, confusion exists concerning the proper design and construction of this obstacle.

The Army Safety Center recommends that all units cease use of the inverted rope descent obstacle until installation safety personnel, in conjunction with qualified construction quality control inspectors, perform a detailed inspection to ensure that each obstacle includes the following:

A platform for an instructor and the soldier to use at the top of the tower, as shown in FM 21-20.

- A 1.5 inch diameter rope attached to the top of the tower, with no knots in the vicinity of the soldier mounting point, as shown in Engineer drawing 28-13-95.
- A safety net attached so that a soldier falling from any portion of the rope will land in the net before striking any part of the tower, as required by FM 21-20.
- Sufficient nets, mats or sawdust below the ropes to reduce the possibility of injuries to soldiers falling from the ropes while negotiating the obstacle.

Additionally, commanders should review maintenance and inspection procedures for all obstacles on confidence obstacle courses. Ensure that required safety nets, properly sized ropes, and other features identified in FM 21-20 and Engineer drawing 28-13-95 are present before allowing soldiers to train on all obstacles.

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